

Fall 2004



## District 5 **TOM PEREZ** Report from

***If you want a job done well,  
give it to a busy person...***

*Health care reform, school overcrowding, affordable housing, small business assistance, trash cans in the parks, recycling, Long Branch, Wheaton and Silver Spring revitalization - the front burner is overflowing with important challenges. It continues to be an honor and a pleasure to serve you.*

*My staff and I are burning the candle at both ends to make sure that we are tackling a wide range of issues affecting the quality of your life. Last December, my Council colleagues elected me Vice President for 2004. This honor has allowed me to assume additional responsibility, and given me even more opportunities to serve you.*

*The budget picture remains quite challenging, but we have managed through hard work and innovation to continue the progress in our public schools, invest in our transportation infrastructure, and ensure a safety net for our most vulnerable residents.*

*I will continue to hold town hall meetings and other listening sessions throughout the District. Your ideas and feedback have been critical. Please continue to make sure that your voice is heard! We have received considerable positive feedback from many constituents about our periodic e-updates. If you would like to be added to the list, e-mail us at [councilmember.perez@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:councilmember.perez@montgomerycountymd.gov)*

## **Finding solutions to our health care crisis and costly prescription drugs**



**S** KYROCKETING health care costs are squeezing working families and local governments alike. The cost of prescription drugs is a primary culprit in this health care crisis. Over the past six years, for instance, the cost to Montgomery County of providing prescription drug benefits for current and retired County employees has doubled. Too many people

controlled Congress have been useless on this issue. The prescription drug benefit that was enacted into law last year was a farce. The only real beneficiaries are the pharmaceutical companies that continue to rack up record profits at the expense of the American people. Congress and President Bush should be driving the prescription drug train, but the train has clearly derailed. As a result, I believe it is time for local governments to take matters into their own hands.

I spearheaded the effort to establish a voluntary program that will allow current and retired employees to purchase certain so-called maintenance medications (drugs you take daily for long periods of time to address chronic conditions) from Canada. I am very grateful for the strong support I received from Councilmembers Denis, Leventhal, Praisner, and Andrews.

A number of states and cities across the country have put such programs in place. Springfield, Massachusetts, was the first city to initiate this program. A city of 150,000 residents, Springfield is set to save \$6 million dollars in the coming year. Montgomery County can save far more, and we can invest that savings in so many worthy areas.

***I spearheaded the effort to establish a voluntary program that would allow current and retired employees to purchase certain [prescription drugs] from Canada.***

lack health insurance, and do not have access to affordable prescription drugs.

Ordinarily, increasing access to affordable prescription drugs is a job for the President and Congress. However, the Bush administration and the Republican-

Springfield has instituted a series of measures to ensure that the drugs purchased from Canada are as safe as the drugs purchased from the neighborhood pharmacy. Canada has one of the safest

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Small Business

# Helping to level the playing field for small firms

**O**NE real measure of a vital economy and community is the environment for small business development and retention. The majority of jobs in Montgomery County are created by small businesses. I have been heavily involved in a number of initiatives to assist small businesses.

I co-sponsored a bill to level the playing field for small businesses seeking to do business in Montgomery County by opening up the County procurement process, and creating a set-aside program for small businesses based in Montgomery County. The legislation, Bill 23-04 - Local Small Business Reserve Program, comes up for Council action this fall.

Our County government purchases tens of millions of dollars in goods and services each year. Yet, the deck is often stacked against our local businesses that are seeking to penetrate this market. I am working hard to give our local businesses an equal opportunity to compete.

Revitalization efforts are underway in Silver Spring and Wheaton. Hardly a week goes by without another grand opening of another piece of the revitalization quilt.

*Silver Spring has indeed sprung!*

Our goal is for the rising tide to lift all boats in downtown Silver Spring, Wheaton and Bethesda that may be collateral victims of redevelopment. In May, the Council adopted Councilmember Denis' and my proposal to establish a new fund to assist small businesses in revitalization areas that have been adversely affected by redevelopment.

The Carpet Bazaar in downtown Silver Spring has been providing quality products

and service for over 20 years. When redevelopment resulted in the tearing down of the nearby parking garage, his business suffered because customers had nowhere else to park.

years. Redevelopment that displaces small businesses like these is not revitalization.

With the assistance of IMPACT Silver Spring, we have conducted a survey of doz-

*I am working hard to give our local businesses an equal opportunity to compete.*

This new fund will assist businesses like Carpet Bazaar as well as Moren, Inc., a small jeweler and jewelry tool supplier that has also been an anchor in Silver Spring for 25

ens of small businesses in Silver Spring. We will continue to knock on doors of business owners across the District to ensure that no business is left behind.



During a press conference, Tom listens to a business owner in Silver Spring where he and Councilmember Denis announced a plan to establish a new fund to assist small firms in revitalization areas that are adversely affected by redevelopment.

## Police substation opens in White Oak

When I met with the White Oak-Hillandale community to learn more about their concerns, a top recommendation was for the creation of a police substation in or around the White Oak Mall. Working with the County Executive and the Police Department, I am very excited that the long discussed vision is now a reality. The new substation, which opened this summer, will enable the Police Department to better serve the neighboring community. Congratulations to the White Oak/Hillandale community for their advocacy on this issue.

*Redevelopment that displaces small businesses...is not revitalization.*



# Tackling MPDUs and predatory lending

*It is time to eliminate the MPDU buyout program.*

**A**FFORDABLE housing will be front and center on the Council's agenda this fall. There are a number of proposals to expand the production of, and increase access to, affordable housing. I have introduced two major initiatives in this area.

First, I believe that we need to revamp our moderately priced dwelling unit (MPDU) program. This nationally recognized program has resulted in the production of thousands of units of affordable housing in Montgomery County. Under this program, a developer seeking to build residential housing must agree to build a certain percentage of affordable units (MPDUs).

In recent years, however, developers have been permitted to take advantage of a loophole in the law that allows them to "buy out" of their requirement to build affordable housing in exchange for a payment to the County's Housing Initiative Fund.

The average "buyout" amount is about \$21,000, and in 2002 the number of buyouts permitted was roughly equal to the number of MPDUs actually produced. In other words,

but for the buyout program, we could have generated twice as many MPDUs in 2002.

It is time to eliminate the buyout program, and extend the period of time that these units remain under County control. I introduced a bill to do this over a year ago, and the Council will finally get to the bill this

Montgomery County. To get a better handle on the problem, a national expert in predatory lending reviewed massive amounts of data from County lenders and prepared a report documenting that African American and Latino homeowners are more than three times likely to have a subprime or FHA loan than

*I introduced a bill to strengthen our Human Relations Ordinance to make clear that predatory lending is unlawful, and to make it easier to pursue.*

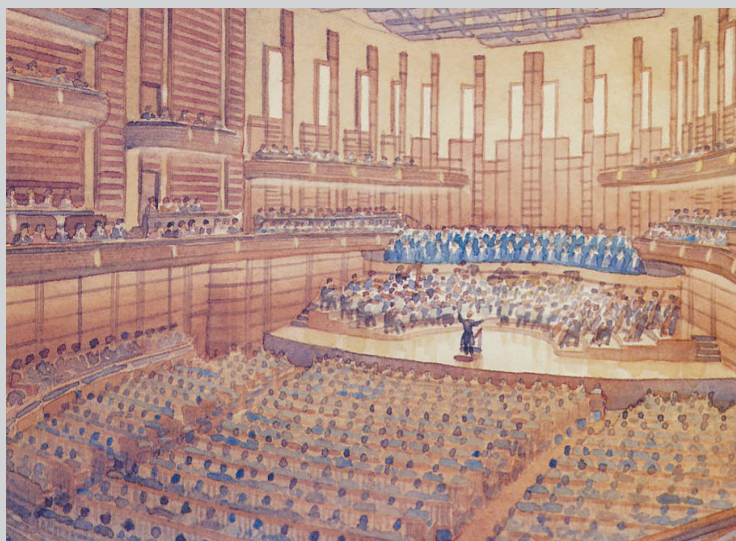
fall. I appreciate the support of Councilmembers Leventhal and Andrews on this bill.

My second initiative attacks the pervasive problem of predatory lending. Given property values in Montgomery County, it is hard enough for any working family to afford a home. For African Americans and Latinos, the American dream of home ownership is even more elusive because they are frequently victims of predatory lending. Predatory lending involves lenders who take advantage of vulnerable home purchasers and saddle them with higher interest rates and hidden costs that frequently overwhelm the homeowner and result in high rates of default.

I have been very concerned that predatory lending is a problem in

similarly situated non-minorities. These loans have much higher interest rates and are often accompanied by a host of hidden costs. Many of these loans are predatory and should be outlawed.

I introduced a bill to strengthen our Human Relations Ordinance to make clear that predatory lending is unlawful, and to make it easier to pursue these cases. In addition, my bill, co-sponsored by Councilmember Subin, requires the County Executive to prepare and make available to the public an annual report on potential predatory lending in Montgomery County. It is important that the County review the existing data regularly to determine whether any trends are emerging in the area of predatory lending.



Artist rendering of The Music Center at Strathmore, opening in 2005

## Keeping our world-class arts center moving forward

I worked closely with Councilmember Leventhal and the County Executive to address \$7.6 million in construction cost overruns at Strathmore Hall Arts Center. After hammering out a resolution, the Council majority approved \$3.3 million to complete construction.

Rather than have taxpayers bear the full load, the Council required the Strathmore Hall Foundation - the private sector - to assume responsibility for \$3.6 million in maintenance and utilities over the next ten years - costs that would otherwise have been borne by the County. These are tough budget times. This approach will enable us to open Strathmore without a dime more being paid by the taxpayers. The resolution paved the way for Strathmore Hall to open its world-class performing arts center in North Bethesda next year, as scheduled.



### **Saving trash cans in the parks**

One of the most frustrating issues that I have faced during the past year is trash cans in our parks. The Council authorized a pilot study for six parks in 2003 to see if a program could save hundreds of thousands of dollars that could be used for other important park programs. Before the pilot was completed, the Council expanded the programs to cover virtually all parks.

In our neck of the woods, the pilot has been a failure. Councilmember Denis and I, with strong support from Councilmember Leventhal, persuaded the Council majority to return the trash cans to some but not all parks.

I continue to believe that the program is a dismal failure, and that we should acknowledge pilot error in our pilot program. Litter is still a problem in so many of our parks, and neighbors who live near parks are frequently bearing the burden of cleanup. It is an environmental and public health problem. It is not cost effective.

Next year, we will revisit this issue in its entirety, and I intend to lead the effort to trash this ill-advised, costly trash policy.

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***It's time to  
trash our carry-in,  
carry-out policy.***

## **Talking trash**

**E**VERY week we put our trash at the curb and someone comes by and takes it away. Most of us don't think much about it, but day by day we are moving closer to a real trash crisis in Montgomery County. In fact, the crisis is upon us.

As Lead member on the Environment, I have spent considerable time talking trash with all stakeholders. I have learned that one need not be an expert to see that Montgomery County has exceeded its limit for trash.

A little over ten years ago, a decision was made to deal with our trash problem by building an incinerator that burns trash and generates electricity. The plan was predicated on our recycling 50 percent of our trash.

After years of insufficient attention to recycling, the County recycling rate is only 37 percent. Our incinerator has gone over capacity and is straining at the seams. We are currently transporting our excess waste to a landfill in Virginia.

Friends, we decided years ago that it is not right to send our problems to other jurisdictions just because we can afford to do it. We made a commitment to deal with our problems here at home. We need to start doing that again.

As soon as I found out about the problem piling up, I worked with my Council colleagues to request a special study of commercial recycling because it is the greatest failure in our recycling plan.

The Office of Legislative Oversight did an excellent job in identifying the problem in Montgomery County and showed the best practices in other jurisdictions.

This fall I will be working on developing a new and improved commercial recycling program in Montgomery County. We cannot rely on the old ways to solve our problem.

You can help by examining your own practices and redoubling your efforts to recycle as much material as possible. Talk trash with your friends. We can solve this problem, but it will take a concerted effort from everyone.

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developing a new and  
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Montgomery County.*

### **Tearing down the billboards - finally**

Are you tired of driving on Georgia Avenue and looking at all the hideous billboards?

Litigation surrounding these billboards has lasted two decades, but it's finally over. As a result of a settlement, the billboards will be coming down.

We took an agreement negotiated by the County Executive and improved it. The Council adopted my amendment demanding that Clear Channel remove the billboards almost twice as fast as originally demanded. Clear Channel agreed to this demand, and I look forward to the end of these unsightly billboards. Tear down the boards!

## Standing up for working people

**I** strongly believe in the right of all workers to make informed choices about whether to join a union free from intimidation or harassment by employers.

***I will continue to fight...  
for working people in  
Montgomery County who  
are standing up for  
their rights.***

On a number of occasions, I have written letters to Montgomery County employers during union organizing campaigns asking them to remain neutral and to allow workers to make a free choice. I did this in the case of a union organizing campaign at Comcast by the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

Regrettably, Comcast did not take my advice. To the contrary, Comcast engaged in an aggressive anti-union campaign that ultimately resulted in CWA's withdrawal of the petition.

Shortly after the failed petition drive, Comcast fired one of the lead organizers of the campaign. When I heard about this, I expressed my concerns to Comcast management. Comcast responded by issuing a subpoena to me a few months later directing me to appear before the National Labor Relations Board and testify at the trial of the fired employee, and produce all information I had about this case.

In my judgment, the subpoena was a thinly veiled attempt to intimidate me or any other person who gets involved in any way in efforts to organize a union at Comcast. The County Attorney filed a legal brief on my behalf seeking to dismiss the subpoena. Once some light was shed on Comcast's scorched earth trial tactic, Comcast quickly settled the case, reinstated the worker with back pay and all back benefits, and withdrew the subpoena.

I will continue to fight for this principle of freedom of choice, and for working people in Montgomery County who are standing up for their rights.



### Meeting the challenges of diversity in the County

Our racial and ethnic diversity is one of our greatest strengths as a community. My staff and I are working on a host of initiatives to ensure that every community's voice is heard.

For instance, I am working with the Fire and Rescue Service to revamp its recruitment process to ensure that we recruit firefighters that are well qualified and reflective of the new Montgomery County.

We are working closely with minority business owners to build a level playing field for them.

I am spearheading an effort to expand the quantity and quality of adult English courses available to immigrants.

Finally, my staff and I are working with a variety of community leaders on a number of projects to expand and sustain the participation of multi-cultural communities in civic life.

Our community is changing, which is very exciting. Our government must work hard to ensure we can meet today's and tomorrow's challenges.



Tom reads from a proclamation that recognized members of a union for their successful organizing campaign and defense of workers' rights.



## Budget Highlights

### Education

■ Increased school operating budget by 7.3% over last year, representing a record \$11,420 in spending per student and moving forward programs that cut reading and math class sizes, and the goal of having full-day kindergarten by 2007 in all elementary schools.

■ Expanded school-based health, mental health and social services programs for at-risk youth; approved funding for 250 more children in pre-kindergarten programs; and restored funding for after-school programs in middle schools.

■ Increased funding by \$100,000 for tutoring at-risk children, and approved funding for after-school programs through several community organizations.

■ Fully funded Montgomery College's \$150 million operating budget request, and doubled capital spending for the College that includes \$8 million for information technology upgrades at all three campuses, plus renovations to the Takoma Park campus.

■ Increased County's share of school construction funding to keep our building, renovation and modernization schedules from slipping further behind due to State's poor support of education.

### Transportation & Public Works

■ Added \$150,000 to increase tree maintenance, particularly in neighborhoods vulnerable to outages during summer and winter storms.

■ Kept commitments to critical community projects such as the Forest Glen pedestrian bridge.

■ Added \$409,000 to extend Ride-On hours on some bus routes; and provided free Ride-On service on key routes serving our most congested, gridlock areas.

■ Added \$200,000 to Fare Share/Super Share incentives to encourage employees to use mass transit.

■ Added funds to start construction on another Glenmont Metro garage to meet the growing demand there.

### Elderly & Disabled

■ Expanded Call 'N Ride program by \$575,000 to meet higher demand from low-income elderly & disabled residents.

**My priorities for the FY05 budget remained constant because they reflect *your* priorities: education, health care, transportation, public safety, and maintaining a safety net for our vulnerable residents.**

## Balancing services and taxes

**A**s the Federal and State governments passed on responsibilities, the buck definitely stopped here at the local level. Our key resources for responsibilities like education, health care, public safety, homeland security, and transportation did not arrive with the funding required to implement them.

Cutting taxes at the Federal and State levels looks great, but the growth in school-age children has put thousands of students in portable classrooms in Montgomery County. The State is funding only \$9 million of the \$60 million for which our children qualified.

Our senior population is also rising fast but programs to keep them independent and at home are being cut by the State and Federal governments.

The Governor gave Montgomery County almost no transportation money, so congestion relief is left to us.

We did cut the property tax by one percent after the Governor raised it by five percent. Unfortunately, we still had to make up for the shortfalls by increasing the energy tax. We did this because this tax is shared by all residents of our community - Federal government, institutions, corporations, as well as individual households. The average increase is about \$30 per household.

My priorities for the FY05 budget remained constant because they reflect *your* priorities: education, health care, transportation, public safety, and maintaining a safety net for our most vulnerable residents. Each of these areas was threatened, but I believe we have at least maintained a constant level of service in these tough financial times.



### Driving taxi reform to improve service

I have been working with all stakeholders - owners, drivers and customers - to make sure that service improves and becomes a more reliable and more viable business. Increased competition and better incomes for drivers should be key goals.

Taxi service is a public/private partnership that requires wise government support and guidance, efficient business practices and knowledgeable drivers and consumers.

### *Kensington school modernization and help for fire stations are on the way*

I spent considerable time working with determined parents to make sure their Kensington-Parkwood school modernization remained on track. The budget also contains funds to accelerate work at Brookview and Connecticut Park elementary schools. We also restored a number of cuts that the County Executive made to critical after-school programs.

Despite our budget woes, I am very proud that the Council unanimously adopted a proposal that I strongly supported to provide additional resources for Kensington Fire Stations 18 and 21. The additional resources will enable these under-staffed stations to reduce their response times, and better serve the communities.

### Solutions to health care crisis

(From page 1)

health care systems in the world; in fact, in the aftermath of the anthrax incidents in 2001, the United States purchased large quantities of anti-anthrax medication from Canada.

It is shameful to see the feeble attempt of opponents of drug importation to paint the Canadian pharmaceutical system in a negative light. Two to three million Americans are currently purchasing prescription drugs from Canada. No one has shown a single American or Canadian harmed by these drugs. As long as Congress, the Bush administration and the Food and Drug Administration continue to abdicate their responsibilities on the prescription drug front, I will continue to fight a grassroots battle at the local level.

The Council passed my resolution establishing this program, and we expect to have the program in place by early next year.

I am also working hard to lower the price of prescription drugs for County residents as a whole. I am playing a leading role in an effort to introduce a program in which any County resident can have access to a card that will allow that person to obtain discounts of up to 30% on prescription drugs.

**I am playing a leading role in an effort to introduce ... a card that will allow [any County resident] to obtain discounts of up to 30% on prescription drugs.**

Nobody in Montgomery County should have to pay full freight for prescription drugs. Unlike other discount drug card programs, this program is open to any resident, and has no fee. It will not cost taxpayers a dime, because we are effectively leveraging our power as a major purchaser of health care to the benefit of our residents. We hope to have this program in place by the end of the year.

Finally, the Council has taken a number of innovative steps to provide additional assistance to our safety net health clinics that serve our most vulnerable residents. For instance, we appropriated \$300,000 to assist in the establishment of a community pharmacy for the uninsured. This program will enable the uninsured who use our safety net clinics to gain access to the most frequently prescribed medications. I applaud my colleague George Leventhal for his leadership on this issue.

Access to health care is a key to self-sufficiency. I am very lucky; my family and I don't have to worry about how to pay for health care because we have insurance and a generous drug benefit.

Too many people are not as fortunate, and I will continue to fight for you because I believe that health care ought to be a right and not a privilege.

**Tom attends a press conference with key supporters of the Council's proposal for a discount prescription drug card for any County resident. With Tom are Councilmembers Denis, Praisner and Leventhal.**



- Restored funding for programs that keep seniors independent and living at home.

#### Taxes and Finances

- Provided \$11 million in property tax relief for County homeowners.

#### Public Safety

- Approved new district police stations in Silver Spring.
- Added \$737,000 for an additional Fire & Rescue class of recruits to ensure homeland security, and approved funding to relocate Wheaton Rescue Squad.

#### Parks & Recreation

- Restored \$1.5 million for park maintenance and operations which includes returning trash cans to some parks.
- Restored \$205,000 in funding for 11 middle school after-school programs.
- Expanded the size of the proposed White Oak recreation center to provide additional space for senior citizens, and continued to work with officials to determine the best site selection.
- Kept commitments to critical community projects such as the Takoma Park Community Center.

#### Economic Development

- Added \$100,000 to the Economic Development Fund to help small businesses negatively impacted by redevelopment in Silver Spring, Wheaton, Bethesda and other areas.
- Approved funding for 800-space parking garage in Wheaton's Westfield Shoppingtown.
- Increased small business support counseling and staffing for minority business assistance.

#### Libraries

- Restored \$300,000 to increase staffing at County libraries, and restored hours of operation cut at Wheaton and two other libraries.
- Approved funding to select the final site for a new Silver Spring Library and renovate the Wheaton Library.



Councilmember Tom Perez  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
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**District 5  
Report from  
TOM PEREZ**

## Quick Reference & Information Guide

Additional information may be obtained for all agencies through the Montgomery County website [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov)

Councilmember Tom Perez 240-777-7966	Homeless Assistance 301-585-4471	Potholes 240-777-7623
County Council 240-777-7900	Housing Emergency 240-777-3100	Procurement 240-777-9904
County Executive -	Housing & Code Enforcement - 240-777-3785	MFD Information 240-777-9913
Community Outreach 240-777-2500	Housing Opportunities Commission - 301-929-6700	Rats 240-777-3986
Abandoned Cars 301-279-8000	Human Resources 240-777-5100	Recreation & Community Centers -
Aging & Disability 240-777-3000	Human Rights 240-777-8450	Coffield 240-777-4900
Bioterrorism Hotline 240-777-4200	Income Support 240-777-3100	East County 301-572-7004
Board of Education 301-279-3617	Information, General 240-777-1000	Gilchrist Cultural Ctr. 240-777-4940
Building Permit 240-777-6210	Kensington, Town of 301-949-2424	Long Branch 301-431-5702
Bus Info / Ride-On 240-777-7433	Landlord & Tenant 240-777-3680	Takoma Park/Langley 301-270-1700
Child Care Referrals 301-279-1773	Libraries -	Wheaton 301-929-5500
Community Use of Public Facilities -	Kensington 301-897-2211	Rental Assistance 240-777-4400
240-777-2706	Long Branch 240-777-0910	Schools 301-279-3391
Consumer Complaints 240-777-3636	Silver Spring 301-565-7689	Senior Centers 301-468-4540
Dental Services 240-777-1875	Wheaton 240-777-0678	Silver Spring Regional Services Center -
Eastern Montgomery Services Center -	White Oak 301-622-2492	301-565-7300
240-777-8400	Liquor Control 240-777-1900	Snow Removal/Roads 240-777-7623
Economic Development 240-777-2000	Mid-County Regional Services Center -	Snow Removal /Sidewalks 240-777-3785
Elections Board 240-777-VOTE	240-777-8100	Takoma Park 301-891-7100
Electricity, PEPCO 202-833-7500	Park & Planning 301-495-4600	Trash & Recycling 240-777-6410
Fire & Rescue -	Parking Enforcement 301-279-8000	Traffic Signals 240-777-2190
Emergency 911	Permitting 240-777-6300	Tree Maintenance 240-777-7263
Non-emergency 240-777-0744	Police -	Vendor License 240-777-3986
Main Number 240-777-2400	Emergency 911	Volunteer Center 240-777-2600
Food Licenses 240-777-3986	Non-emergency 301-279-8000	Water Quality 240-777-7770
Health Centers -	Community Outreach 240-840-2585	Weeds, Grass 240-777-3785
Piccard Dr. 240-777-3987	3rd Dist. (Silver Spring) 301-565-7740	Women's Commission 240-777-8330
Silver Spring 240-777-3160	4th Dist. (Wheaton) 240-773-5500	WSSC 301-206-8000
Highway Services 240-777-7623		Zoning Complaints 240-777-6259
		Zoning Information 240-777-6240